FOSTER PARENT RETENTION
AND STABILITY OF FOSTER PLACEMENTS

Report to the Legislature

January 2002

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

REPORT TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

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And Stability of Foster Placements

INTRODUCTION

This report is provided in accordance with the 2001 budget proviso requiring the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to report quarterly to the Legislature "progress against appropriate baseline measures for foster parent retention and stability of foster placements."

RETENTION OF FOSTER PARENTS

DSHS measures retention of foster homes by tracking the net number of licensed homes. The baseline for this measurement begins July 1, 2001; this report documents the number of homes for the quarter ending Sept. 30, 2001.

RETENTION	July 1, 2001 Homes	Sept. 30, 2001 Homes	% change
STATEWIDE BASELINE	6,396	6,362	(0.53)
REGION 1	859	844	(1.75)
REGION 2	777	806	3.70
REGION 3	902	896	(0.67)
REGION 4	1,260	1,248	(0.96)
REGION 5	1,224	1,222	(0.17)
REGION 6	1,374	1,346	(2.04)

STABILITY OF PLACEMENTS

DSHS measures stability of placements using the federal standard of: "Two percent (of children) with no more than two placements during the first 12 months in care."
The baseline period for this report begins July 1, 2001 and is for the quarter ending Sept. 30, 2001.

STABILITY OF PLACEMENTS	JULY 1, 2001	SEPTEMBER 30, 2001	% CHANGE
STATEWIDE BASELINE	81.1 %	81.7 %	0.06
REGION 1	86.9 %	87.1 %	0.20
REGION 2	79.4 %	77.8 %	(1.90)
REGION 3	76.9 %	76.9 %	0.00
REGION 4	78.6 %	80.7 %	2.10
REGION 5	81.8 %	82.9 %	1.10
REGION 6	82.4 %	84.5 %	2.10

ANALYSIS

During the period of July 1, 2001 through September 30, 2001 the Division of Licensed Resources field offices within the Children's Administration completed an effort to ensure the accuracy of the number of licensed foster homes entered in the Case And Management Information System (CAMIS) data base. Prior to completion of that project there were instances of duplicate license entry, as well as instances of homes that had left the system, but license closure had not been entered into CAMIS. Because of this data clean-up effort, it may be more accurate to consider the September 30 number as the baseline number of homes. It is not clear that the reduction of licensed homes during this reporting period represents an actual net loss or is the result of more accurate data.

Nevertheless, retention of foster homes is a key issue for those trying to improve the system. The Foster Care Improvement Plan, a new, collaborative initiative between DSHS, Casey Family Programs, and other community partners, has identified retention as its primary goal.

The department and private child-placing agencies are quite successful at recruiting foster homes. Between July 1, 2001 and Dec. 1, 2001, more than 600 new homes were licensed. However, retention of foster families is an issue as many foster parents do leave the system.

Families leave the system, for a variety of reasons.

- Some families provide foster care as part of the process to adopt a child or children. Once the adoptions are complete, they do not continue as foster parents.
- Some families provide foster care for a specific child, such as a coach or teacher taking in a child in their class who is having trouble at home.
- Some families leave because of changed life circumstances such as divorce, death or relocation.
- Some families leave because they exhaust their reserve of tolerance. Caring for foster children is a tough job.
- Some families leave because they are dissatisfied with the way they feel they have been treated by the department or the larger foster care system.

The heart and soul of the Foster Care Improvement Plan centers on changing the culture of the department to improve the relationship between those parents providing foster care, their social workers, and others within the foster care system. The goal of the plan is to increase the number of foster families by retaining families in the system while recruiting new families.

Through the Foster Care Improvement Plan and many other initiatives, DSHS is seeking to meet that goal. Under the plan several efforts have begun to help support and retain foster parents:

- Potential foster parents are now being provided information and on-going support from their initial inquiry to the day they become licensed.
- Work has begun on developing a method to document foster parent satisfaction. This will provide a means to address potential problems and provide on-going support to foster families.
- The executive committee of the Foster Care Improvement Plan is examining a method of coordinating the array of support services available to foster families. A focused, coordinated support network will greatly enhance foster parent retention.

Stability of children in placement is dependent on a number of factors, one of the most important of which is having a large and diverse community of foster families to meet the unique needs of dependent children. Increasing and maintaining the number of satisfied foster parents will allow the best match between child and family and will increase likelihood of stable foster placement.